

The Government's response to the Science and Technology Committee's second report, Session 1996-97, Association of British Insurers'Policy statement on life insurance and genetics : third special report / Science and Technology Committee.

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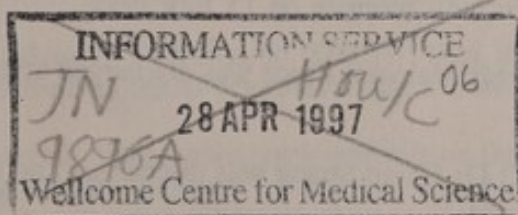


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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Third Special Report

The Government's Response to the Science and Technology Committee's Second Report, Session 1996-97, Association of British Insurers' Policy Statement on Life Insurance and Genetics



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The Science and Technology Committee is appointed under Standing Order No 130 to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of Science and Technology and associated public bodies.

The Committee consists of 11 Members. It has a quorum of three. Unless the House otherwise orders, all Members nominated to the Committee continue to be Members of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

The Committee has power:

- (a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time;
- (b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference;
- (c) to communicate to any other such committee and to the Committee of Public Accounts and to the Deregulation Committee its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest; and
- (d) to meet concurrently with any other such committee for the purposes of deliberating, taking evidence, or considering draft reports.

The following were nominated Members of the Committee on 13 July 1992:

Mr Spencer Batiste
Dr Jeremy Bray
Mr Malcolm Bruce
Mrs Anne Campbell
Cheryl Gillan
Mr William Powell

Sir Giles Shaw
Sir Trevor Skeet
Dr Gavin Strang
Sir Gerard Vaughan
Dr Alan W Williams

Sir Giles Shaw was elected Chairman on 15 July 1992.

On 9 November 1992 Mr Malcolm Bruce was discharged and Mr Andrew Miller added to the Committee.

On 16 November 1992 Dr Gavin Strang was discharged and Dr Lynne Jones added to the Committee.

On 7 November 1995 Cheryl Gillan and Mr William Powell were discharged and Mr Ian Bruce and Mr Patrick Thompson were added to the Committee.

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THIRD SPECIAL REPORT

The Science and Technology Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

We have received the following letter from Ian Taylor MBE MP, the Minister for Science and Technology enclosing the Government's response to the Second Report from the Science and Technology Committee, Session 1995-96, Association of British Insurers' Policy Statement on Life Insurance and Genetics (HC 328):

**Letter to the Chairman from the Minister for Science and Technology
(17 March 1997)**

I am writing to respond formally to your Committee's recent report, "Association of British Insurers's Policy Statement on Life Insurance and Genetics".

The Government welcomes the Select Committee's report and accepts the Committee's recommendation that the Human Genetics Advisory Commission (HGAC) "examine the ABI's proposals as a matter of urgency, and that they keep the topic under review in future".

At its first meeting on 27 February 1997, the Advisory Commission highlighted insurance and genetics as a key area for their considerations. A copy of the statement issued by the Advisory Commission after the meeting is attached. A sub-group has been set up to explore the complex issues with interested parties and report back their initial findings to the next meeting of the HGAC planned for 15th May. The Government looks forward to receiving the Advisory Commission's advice in this area and will wish to draw on it in future discussions with representatives of the insurance industry.

I should be grateful if the Committee would publish this letter in order to make this response available to Parliament and more widely.

Press Notice issued by the HGAC - 27 February 1997

**NEW HUMAN GENETICS ADVISORY COMMISSION PUTS PUBLIC
CONFIDENCE AT THE TOP OF ITS AGENDA**

The new Human Genetics Advisory Commission (HGAC) held its first meeting today to consider its work plan and outline its initial priorities. The following was agreed:

- Members discussed the recent reports about new research on the cloning of sheep. They recognised that cloning human embryos by nuclear transfer was already expressly forbidden by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. It was decided that the Chairman of HGAC would write to his counterpart on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to confirm the adequacy of the existing law.
- Recognising the implications of genetic testing for insurance as an immediate priority, the HGAC decided to set up a group to explore the complex issues with interested parties. The group will report back their initial findings to the next meeting of the HGAC to be held on 15 May.
- The HGAC recognised that privacy would be an underpinning issue in establishing confidence in the new science. It has decided to conduct an appraisal of the implications for privacy, as a preliminary to further work.
- The HGAC undertook to receive a report on the genetic services provided by NHS at its meeting on 15 May. The group recognised the potential benefits for health of genetic science eg in treating inherited disorders and cancers.

The Commission affirmed its commitment to listening and making itself open to wider public views on the issues at stake. This will be crucial in helping the HGAC develop its thinking.

The HGAC will be keeping under review scientific progress at the frontiers of genetic research which have implications for human genetics. As an important part of the process, it proposes holding a consultative meeting with scientists.

The HGAC recognised the need to explore a variety of methods to gauge public opinion including ways of collaborating with other bodies with existing interests in this area.

Following the meeting, the Chairman of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, Sir Colin Campbell, said, "I am delighted that the Advisory Commission has now held its first meeting. We have had very fruitful discussions this afternoon about a whole array of issues and the Commission is now focused on the work ahead, recognising both the potential benefits and concerns raised by the new science. One of the questions we discussed was how to communicate most effectively with the public at large. There is no doubt that genetics will continue to be a major issue. We will be consulting widely and we intend our activities to be open as possible. You will be hearing from us."

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